

# PORCH-SITTING: A VANISHING ART

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Something important has all but disappeared from our society. It's a skill—no, an art, a way of life. I'm referring to the practice of porch-sitting.

My fondest memories of my maternal grandparents are of sitting with them on their front porch.

“Don't put your feet under that swing,” my grandmother warned. “It might fall and crush your legs.” She headed into the house to check something in the oven but reappeared a second later, adding, “And don't bounce on it either. The springs might break.”

But it never fell. The springs never broke. Our legs never got crushed. Not that we didn't test it.

The porch was quiet, the only sounds being the metallic squeak of the spring and the tap of my grandparents' feet as they slowly rocked in old, paint-encrusted rocking chairs. If my grandparents were in a reflective mood, they might tell stories. If a train interrupted, they stopped midsentence and rocked silently until the train had passed. Then they picked up right where they had left off.

On hot days, my grandparents used hand-held funeral-home fans to cool themselves. I often wondered if the energy expended moving the fans created more heat than coolness.

I got to know my grandparents best from porch-sitting. I learned about their experiences—my heritage. I learned what was important to them—their values and their views on politics, economics, and religion. I learned about their culture—their music, their stories, their humor. I learned by their example how to relax and appreciate the sounds and smells of nature. And I saw how all of those things made them who and what they were.

The benefits of porch-sitting far outweigh the myriad excuses offered for not doing so. Whenever I have a knotty problem to resolve, time spent porch-sitting generally helps me sort things out. An early riser, I enjoy sitting on my southwest-facing front porch in spring, bundled against the chill and sipping coffee. In the

quietness, I think, pray, plan my day, and listen to the birds as they greet the new day.

Last spring, my not-quite-three-year-old granddaughter came to visit us. With her parents sleeping late, MacKenzie was full of energy, hindering my wife's breakfast preparations. I gently lifted MacKenzie and whispered as I walked toward the front door, "Let's go out on the porch and listen to the birds."

That was a novel idea to her. We sat in the rocker. I wrapped my fleece around her and whispered, "Do you hear the birds?"

She didn't.

"There! That's a mocking bird." I imitated the imitator. "There he is again!"

Soon, MacKenzie was attuned to sounds she'd never realized were all around her. We sat on the porch listening until breakfast. We called her after they returned home and asked her what she'd been doing. She exclaimed, "Lis'ning to buds!"

I think maybe she has caught onto one benefit of porch-sitting.

You can too. Take a break from electronic gadgets and reap the rewards of the lost art of porch-sitting.